WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for operating a user station configured for communications with a multiplicity of independently-operated data sources via a non-proprietary network, comprising:

receiving a first data object from one of the data sources; and,

automatically pre-fetching a plurality of additional data objects of arbitrary type referenced by the first data object from respective other ones of the independently-operated data sources identified by information embedded in the first data object.

2. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the first data object and the plurality of additional data objects are not graphical data objects.

3. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the first data object and the plurality of additional data objects are graphical data objects.

4. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the first data object and the plurality of additional data objects are platform-independent data objects.

5. The method as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising automatically storing the plurality of additional data objects on a storage medium at the user station.

6. The method as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising automatically storing the plurality of additional data objects in a temporary storage location at the user station.

7. The method as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising automatically storing the plurality of additional data objects on a persistent storage medium at the user station.

8. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the information embedded in the first data

object comprises metadata.

9. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the information embedded in the first data object comprises a plurality of addresses identifying each of the respective ones of the data sources.

10. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the network is the Internet.

11. Software stored on a computer-readable storage medium at a user station that is configured for communications with a multiplicity of independently-operated data sources via a non-proprietary network, comprising:

a fetch function for fetching a first data object from one of the data sources; and,

a pre-fetch function for automatically pre-fetching a plurality of additional data objects of arbitrary type referenced by the first data object from respective other ones of the independently-operated data sources identified by information embedded in the first data object.

12. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the first data object and the plurality of additional data objects are not graphical data objects.

13. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the first data object and the plurality of additional data objects are graphical data objects.

14. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the first data object and the plurality of additional data objects are platform-independent data objects.

15. The software as set forth in Claim 11, further comprising a store function for automatically storing the plurality of additional data objects on a storage medium at the user station.

16. The software as set forth in Claim 11, further comprising a store function for

automatically storing the plurality of additional data objects in a temporary storage location at the user station.

17. The software as set forth in Claim 11, further comprising a store function for automatically storing the plurality of additional data objects on a persistent storage medium at the user station.

18. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the information embedded in the first data object comprises metadata.

19. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the information embedded in the first data object comprises a plurality of addresses identifying each of the respective ones of the data sources.

20. The software as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the network is the Internet.

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